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Balder's Death and Loke's Punishment

by

Cornelia Steketee Hulst

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AND

LOKE'S PUNISHMENT

BY

CORNELIA STEKETEE HULST

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

CHICAGO
THE OPEN COURT PUBLISHING CO.
1918

THIS WORK IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED

TO

THE HONORABLE RASMUS B. ANDERSON.

His "Norse Mythology" gave the first impulse to its composition. A poet at heart, he interpreted the myths so that they became vital; himself a creative scholar, he freely gave his interest and sympathy to this work when he was an entire stranger to the author; a most generous and stimulating friend, he and his gracious wife have added charm and glory to our years since they have known us.

C. S. H.

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN.

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FOREWORD.

IN these incidents from Northern Mythology it has been my intention to be true to the version presented in the Eddas, about 1000 A. D., a version which is poetically consistent and which takes a higher flight, particularly in all that relates to Balder, than pagan literature in general does. This fact seems to be owing to the new ideas and the new spirit that the scalds received through Viking contact with Christianity in the South. The solution here presented for "Balder's Death" was worked out independently from facts given in the Eddas, to accord with conditions as stated and to ensure poetic justice; and this solution is confirmed by Rydberg, who brought a wealth of medieval learning to sustain his argument in his "Teutonic Mythology." Bugge's learned study citing Christian literary sources that probably were influential in forming the Balder myth also tends to confirm this solution. The descent of Balder into Hell and his coming rule in the Realm of the Spirit when the New Heaven and the New Earth have risen, when this Heaven and this Earth pass away, after the Twilight of the Gods, offers the only consistent and adequate solution, not only for this incident, but for others linked to it, notably the epic of Siegfried and Brunhilde, which even in Wagner's version is not complete and satisfying. In the Icelandic version Siegfried is without reproach, and Brunhild in disobeying Odin obeys a higher law, so both merit a future with a perfect king in a heavenlier Heaven than Odin's, which is tainted with evil. When they go to Balder, though in Hell, it will now be seen that poetic justice is satisfied; it will be completely satisfied when both rise with Balder into his New Heaven after Odin and the evil of his dispensation have been swept away.

The literary form of these poems is a variety of Free Verse, but they were composed mainly before 1900 and therefore before the present school of Free Verse had been developed. This variety was evolved under the influence of the alliterative verse of the Eddas and Beowulf, but was an unconscious product, not in any sense an imitation.

The illustrations are selected from the rare series with which Frölich illustrated the Eddas.

May the good and the beautiful that come to us from the Past never die, and may the victory of Balder and the defeat of Odin forever inspire us with hope and courage.

MRS. HENRY HULST.

GLADSHEIM, Nov. 7, 1917.

PERSONS.

Odin—All-Father, King of the Asas in Asgard.

Frigg—his Queen, mother of Balder.

Balder—the Good, the Just, the Asa of Light, Father of Justice.

Nanna—his wife.

Hoder—the Blind, his brother.

Thor—the Thunderer, Asa of Battle.

Tyr—the Asa of War.

Vidar—the Silent and Ready, the recuperative power of Nature.

Vale—the young son of Odin and Rind (the Frozen-Earth).

Brage—Asa of Song, inspirer of the Asas.

Idun—Brage's wife, guardian of the Apples of Youth and Strength.

Hermod—the Swift, Messenger of the Asas.

Heimdal—guardian of Bifrost, the Rainbow-Bridge that leads from Earth to Asgard.

Loke—son of the Jotun Farbaute, adopted among the Asas, but later a foe of Odin.

Sigyn—his wife, an Asa, called the Tender and True, deserted by Loke.

Angerboda—A Jotun witch who bodes anguish, wedded by Loke when he deserted Sigyn.

Hel—daughter of Loke and Angerboda, Queen of Hell, the Kingdom of the Lower World.

Fenrer—the Wolf, son of Loke and Angerboda.

The Midgard Serpent—son of Loke and Angerboda.

PALACES.

Valhal—Odin's Hall of Heroes in Asgard.

Fensal—Frigg's Palace in Asgard.

Broadblink—Shining Splendor, Balder's Palace. It is built in Peace Place, which is a sanctuary.

Gladsheim—the gold hall of Brage and Idun in the Happy Valley. It lies at the East.

Anguish—Hel's Palace in Niflhel.

Gimle—the Palace in Alfheim where Balder will reign after Ragnarok, when the New Heaven and the New Earth have risen.

ARGUMENT.

THE first scene of this story is in the Heaven of Norse Mythology, or, to be more exact, in Asgard, the city of the Asas; and the characters are the Asas, the Norse gods, whose King is Odin. Asgard must be imagined as a golden city, not only paved with gold but piled with gold from the foundation to the pinacles of its palaces. It is a wonderwork of the most skilful of the giant race, the Jotuns, who were once friends of the Asas but are now foes, alienated by rivalry for power and gold.

In the scheme of the Universe, Asgard lies in the upper branches of the Tree of Life, where it rests at the top of the arch of Bifrost, the Rainbow Bridge, by which the Asas descend to earth when they will, riding their horses, except Thor, who is so heavy that he would break through its ethereal substance. As far beneath the earth as Asgard lies above it, is the Lower World, called Hell, or Helheim because it is the home of Queen Hel, a Jotun whose power is matched with Odin's and who will lead her kindred to attack him in Asgard as soon as she is able.

Hel is the daughter of Loke, the destructive spirit of Fire.

The Golden City of Asgard shines in splendor against a blue sky, and Odin, its king, is clad in a regal mantle of blue. Among his circle he is kingly indeed, a leader in battle, triumphant in single combat, astute in counsel, and a loving father to his heroes. All-Father is the name with which they chiefly honor him, but they add many other names in honor of his powers and exploits, such as the Many-in-One, Ygg (the Clear-Thinker), and the Wayfarer. Odin's sister, Frigg, is also his wife, and as Queen of Heaven is justly honored, for she is wise and good. The son of Odin and Frigg is Balder, the best loved Asa in heaven. Like Odin, Balder has many appropriate names, among which are the White One, the Peaceful, and the Father of Justice, for his palace has sheltered no evil. He is clothed in radiant white, and rays beam about him as from a sun. Balder is the glory of heaven. As is fit, Nanna,

his wife, is like him though lesser, a moon-white Dis, and their union is the most perfect.

The nature of Loke is flame, and his color is flame; but Hel is death-white, and her heart is cold, as her kingdom lies cold in a region of eternal frost and snow. Hel is the most powerful of Loke's evil offspring. Her mother is no less hated, a Jotun witch named Angerboda, because she bodes anguish to all of her friends as well as her foes. This circle of destructive spirits, including also Hel's terrible brothers, the Midgard Serpent and the Fenris Wolf, bide their time to conquer both Earth and Asgard, mustering their forces in the Lower World and in the Mirkwood, where Angerboda's wolf-sons congregate. At Ragnarok, the World's Twilight, they will issue forth for the final struggle. In the one great conflict that they have so far had with Odin for the rule of the world, Odin has been able to control them, casting the Serpent far forth into the sea, binding the Wolf Fenrer to a rock on a distant island, Lyngve, and banishing Hel to the Lower World, where in the lowest of nine gloomy circles she established her throne, called Despair. Hers is a sad, loveless kingdom, and she is the cold sovereign of the dead. The Weird Norns (Past, Present, and Future), made her supreme in the Lower World, and gave her permission to come to Earth only at midnight to select those who are to belong to her. Brave warriors are chosen by the Valkyrie, Odin's War Maidens, to be taken dying from the battlefield to Valhal, his Hall of Heroes in Asgard; but those who are cowards or who die at peace are taken by Hel.

The incidents in this story occur shortly after the Wolf Fenrer has been bound, when Loke and Hel have been balked in their purpose to capture Asgard by means of Fenrer's wonderful strength. The action begins on one of Hel's midnight visits to Earth to give warning to those whom she has chosen to die.

BALDER'S DEATH.

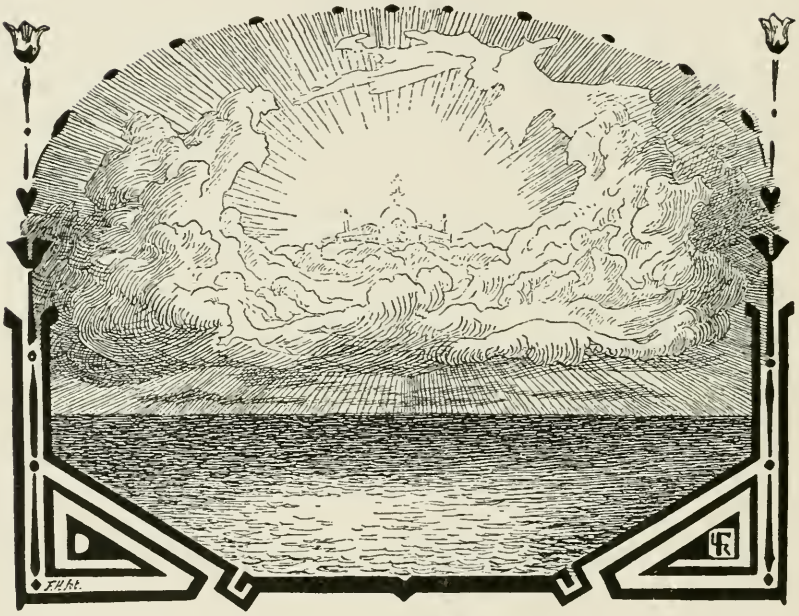
NOW the dusk and the nightfall were early
And the dawn was late in its coming,
Nature gives signs that forebode disaster.
And the days were so dark that at noontide
Deep shadows lay brooding in Valhal—
Strange sights; and strange sounds smote the hearing,
Low soughing and sighing and whispers.
It shook the hearts of the hearers.
Were Hel and her hordes from cold Helheim
Stealing on Asgard in darkness?....
The eyes of the erewhile calm Asas
Grew gloomy, and heavy their hearts were;
Sore troubled, they tossed on their couches.
And, the first time in Asgard, one midnight
A moaning and crying awaked them....
Fear sucked at their hearts like a vampire....
Then a wailing arose in Bright Broadblink
Whence naught but joy's sounds had e'er issued;
And shrill, as pine shrieks when the lightning
Has cleft to its heart, Balder shrieked,
And the ramparts of Asgard echoed
And its vaulting re-echoed his shrieking.

They groped their way through the dark,
Balder's dream.
And as day broke in Asgard held council
And heard Balder's dream,
His vision of evil impending:

"All we love, all we hate were in conflict!
The Gulph of the Nether World opened
And Hel sought her lord....to dwell with her....
And I was her lord, and must follow,
For Death hurled his dart, and it hit me."

Nanna pleads for him.

And Nanna, his spouse, where she lay
With her flowerlike face on Frigg's bosom,
His mother's, shuddered and sobbed
Ere she spoke in accents complaining,
"Aye, Hel came to Asgard, love-hungry;
She sought her a lord....she craves mine....
Me she hates—O Father! O Mother!
King! Frigg! Help our Balder
Or Hel will yet hale him to Helheim!"



THE HEAVENLY CITY.

Frigg's answer.

And Frigg answered, comforting Nanna,
"Dear child, who would harm our good Balder,
Beloved Light of the Heavens?
If Hel does desire him—oh, surely
She never will find one to slay him,
For all in the world love our Balder!"

But still Frigg was troubled at heart,
Asking why was his slumber afflicted
With dreams that foreboded disaster:
And Nanna, still weeping, repeated,
"Hel will yet hale him to Helheim."

Odin departs to learn the future.

Then Odin, the wise, the Clear-Thinker,
Who loved Balder more dearly then any
For that best he knew his son's nature,
So gentle and loving and peace-full,
Arose and departed in silence.

Frigg's efforts to save Balder.

But Frigg, with the Asas remaining,
Took oath from all Nature to spare him
So that Hel could find nothing to slay him.
She bound land and water with oaths,
And gold, and silver, and iron,—

All metals, all earths, all plants
That are growing or grown on the earth,
In the air or the water; all birds,
All diseases, all reptiles, all creatures
That creep, walk, or fly, to earth's confines.

The fears of the Asas are relieved.

And again there was joy in the heavens,
And a marvel it was, those glad days,
To see how all nature loved Balder.
They gathered a circle about him
And, playful, threw missiles upon him
In their sports on his plain, the fair Peace Place;
And great was the honor they did him,
Hewing, and hacking, and hurling,
Most mighty, most skilful,—and harmless.
Darts recoiled, and hard flints did not hurt him;
Asa blades bit not, but rebounded
Though keen and hero-like wielded;
When it hurtled forth with his thunder,
Thor's Hammer to Thor's hand returned
And on Balder had left no more mark
Than an arrow when cleaving the heavens
Can leave on the air it has parted.
Frigg smiled, Nanna laughed, and bright Balder
Forgot his dream and its portent.

Odin journeys to the Vala

But Odin, All-Father, forgot not,
Nor smiled, as he rode through deep valleys,
Descending and dark, to the North.
Swiftly his steed passed the landmarks,

His Sleipner, fleet-footed and willing,
Smiting the earth till it trembled
With the beat of his feet, rune-enristed.
For nine days successive down Helway
He traveled, by bridges, o'er chasms
And wastes, till he came to Hel's kingdom;
And never he stopped or turned back
Though her Hel-hounds he met, slaughter-craving,
Foam-flecked and blood-stained and gaping,
That bayed as he passed,
And though bands of the Dead hailed him, wailing.
But when Hell-walls loomed black through the darkness,

With towers and pinacles beetling,
And heavy-barred Hell-gates denied him—
Would he force them, again to face Hel?....
To the East he turned Sleipner, to the death-house
Where the Vala, a seeress, lay buried.

He practices his art to raise her from her grave.

Three times he circled around it,
Three times in widening circles,
And three times three, chanting Runes;
Then, facing the North, a spell
He pronounced, most potent, compelling,
Until, in her grave, Vala wakened,
And rose in winding-sheet swathèd,
And uttered unwilling,
In accents grave-hollow, death-husky:

Vala speaks.

"My grave has been covered with snow;
My grave has been beaten with rain;
Upon it the night-dews have fallen
As many a year I have lain;
Pass onward, and leave me in quiet,
Thou stranger—What is thy name,
That hast wakened my ghost in its grave?"

Odin deceives her as to his name, and compels her to answer.

And Odin, the Many-in-One,
Spoke the name he ever is named
From that journey forth: "The Wayfarer, I,
Veltam's son; and of Hel I demand,
And these benches with rings overspread.

For whom is Hel's banquet prepared?
For whom are her couches o'erlaid?
Speak, Vala, and tell;
I shall bind thee with runes, that thou answer."

He learns that Balder must die,

"The mead that stands brewed is for Balder—
Let the race of the Asas bewail him!
Now thou hast compelled me to speak it,
And now let me lay me to rest."

ODIN QUESTIONING VALA.

that Hoder will slay him,

But Odin: "Speak, Vala!
I shall bind thee with runes, that thou answer,
For yet I must learn of his slayer."
And Vala:
"Blind Hoder will slay him,
Will send his glorious brother
To dwell in the halls of dark Helheim.
Now thou hast compelled me to speak it,
And now let me lay me to rest."

But Odin: "Speak, Vala!
I shall bind thee with runes, that thou answer;
Thou still must reveal me the vengeance
That any may wreak on his slayer."

and that Vidar and Vale will avenge him;

"Young Vale and Vidar the 'vengers
Who his slayer shall slay.
Now thou hast compelled me to speak it,
And now let me lay me to rest."

but when Odin asks concerning the Norns

And Odin: "Speak, Vala!
The Maidens, three Jotuns—"
(Of the Wise Ones he questioned, the Weird Ones
Who weave the web of the world,
Urd, and Verdand', and Skuld,
That-Has-Been, That-Is, and That-Shall-Be)

Vala knows him for Odin, and taunts him with his impotence.

But Vala broke forth when he named them,
"Not the Wayfarer—ODIN!
Now I know!—thou hast tricked me!....
Hel, help! I appeal to Queen Hel!
Go, boast of thy knowledge, exulting!
The Norns have his thread, and are weaving—
Can thy runes cast a spell upon Skuld,
Or alter a thread in the pattern
That Verdand' is weaving?
Hel, help! I appeal to Queen Hel!
To her the Norns gave dark Helheim,
And wanhope is thine in that kingdom!
Henceforth no more questions I answer
Till bondage be broken at Doom.
I sleep till the sound of the Trumpet."

Then Odin withdrew him toward Valhal,
For Vala took refuge with Hel.
And, again for nine days, to the South
He rode; climbing the heights of his city
While he pondered what Vala foretold.

III.

Loke, disguised as a maiden

Now Loke, the evil, heard laughter,
As he lurked at the portals of Asgard,
And in his fell spirit most spiteful
Were the thoughts and the feelings that wakened.
Assuming the guise of a maid

That is free from all guile, to Fensal,
That fairest of gold-halls, he came,
Where Frigg sat with Nanna in converse:
"Mother, why are the Asas so blithesome?"

VOLUSPA.

questions Frigg,

His tongue that asked it dripped honey.
The Mother of Asas made answer,
"Our Balder is safe from Hel's clutches;
Creation has sworn not to harm him,
The air and the earth and the water,

All life that is *in, on, or under,*"—
The honey-sweet voice interrupted.
"What, *all* things have sworn it?"
"The things I have spoken have sworn it,
and learns her secret. But now I bethink me, a thing
That is growing nor *on* earth, *nor under,*
Nor *in* air or water, nor *under,*
But, sole of its kind, on an oak tree—
The mistletoe twig—hath not sworn it;
But weak is its nature, and tender."

Loke had what he sought, and went forth
He seeks Balder, to slay him. Straightway to seek mistletoe growing.
From an oak tree he cut it, then hied
To the sports of the Asas in Peace Place.
Balder's broad, smiling Mead,
Where in midst of the Circle stood Balder,
The White, white-browed and white robèd,
Radiant, beaming around,
While about him flew missiles, played weapons
In that game that they made in his honor.
And as each play failed of effect
Odin returns to Asgard, rejoicing to hear that Balder is still safe. There rose shouts and applause from the players
So loud and so long that the Wayfarer
Nearing the portals of Asgard
Heard, and rejoiced that he heard,
For they told of the safety of Balder.

Apart from the Circle stood Hoder,
Loke persuades Hoder to throw the mistletoe, The Blind, the twin brother of Balder.
The smile on his face spoke contentment
And pride in the prowess of Balder.
"And why do you not honor Balder,
Hoder?" said Loke; and Hoder,
"Because I am blind, and unable."
"Stand forth, then, and take thou this missile
And hurl with thy might; I will guide thee."
And Hoder, to honor his Balder,
Put forth all his might, and the mistletoe
and strikes Balder down. Flew from his hand, Death's own dart—
And pierced Balder....

And again Balder shrieked, as that midnight,
Balder's dream is fulfilled. And heaven re-echoed his shrieking
From rampart to rampart and vaulting
And again from the vault to the ramparts,
Through the Halls of the Heavenly City,
To Fensal, where Nanna and Frigg
Were weaving their wreaths, and to Odin,
Who had entered the gates of his City.

Ah, who can tell of their grief!
The grief in Asgard, Beyond power of speech was their sorrow,
And a deathlike stillness fell on them
As still Death had fallen on Balder.
The Heavenly City lay hushed
As the yard where the dead lie entombèd.
But when dying—nay, *dead,* Balder fell,
There rose wailing and groans from the Asas
From throats that were strangers to weeping,
From heroes of godlike endurance.
of Vidar, Tyr, Thor, Vale, Only Vidar stood silent, unshaken;
Tyr trembled; Thor shook like an aspen;
Young Vale's breast heaved, tempest-shaken,
And through his clenched teeth an oath rattled;
Hoder, Apart and unheeded stood Hoder,
His face as a ghost's strayed from Helheim,
His blind eyes strained as if seeing,
His white lips at horrible working,
Form tense, hand at ear, forward bending.
and Odin. And then Father Odin descended,
And gathered his son to his heart
And bemoaned him:

"Oh Balder, my Son, my Belovèd,
Odin's lament. Would that Weird had taken thy Father!
Full gladly—my life for thy life—
Take it—Oh, would thou mightst take it—"
Then his accents were lost in his sobbing.

And when Frigg and Nanna together
The grief of Frigg and Nanna. Approached, Balder's wife and his mother—
Too sacred their sorrow,
Draw the veil and gaze not upon it....

At last Frigg spoke: "Who will go
Frigg advises ransom; but Thor proposes war. And pray Hel to take ransom for Balder?"
"Give her ransom?" roared Thor, *"Give her Battle!*
I reed you, storm Hel and take Balder!
We had better force battle to-day than wait longer—
First, vengeance! Who was the slayer?"
The red beard shook on his bosom;
From 'neath brows beetling black as his storm-clouds
Light leapt, levin-red, as he thundered.
His knuckles gleamed white
As he tightened his hold on the haft of his hammer.

Then Hoder groped forward, bowed, broken,—
Hoder confesses his act, and tells of Loke. "I give myself to his 'vengers—
This hand was the hand that slew Balder—
But Loke's the voice—his the purpose."
And he told the tale of the slaying.

The Asas started for Loke
To tear him to pieces. "Peace Place!"
Cried Loke, "This is Balder's Peace,
Loke pleads sanctuary Where violence cannot be done
But vengeance will follow the doer."
And Nanna pled, "This is Balder's Peace,
Let no one profane it with vengeance."
and escapes, So Loke escaped.
And again Thor thundered, *"Storm Helheim*
And rescue our Balder!"
And the Asas echoed, "Storm Hell!"

And forthwith they had sworn and departed,
Frigg gives counsel, But that Frigg spoke, calmly and sadly,
"Nay, Asas, storm Hell not, for Helheim
The Norns gave to Hel till the Trumpet
Shall sound on the morning of Doom—
Ye must fail if ye go—but go one
And offer our ransom to Hel."

And Hermod, surnamed the Nimble,
and Hermod departs on the mission, while Said, "Frigg, I will go on thy mission,"
And Odin gave fleet-footed Sleipner
To Hermod departing for Hell.

Then the Asas bore Balder's pale form
The Asas deck the funeral ship. Where his Ringhorn lay, greatest of vessels,
And on its broad deck built his pyre
Of the boughs that they brought from the forest;
And there each laid a gift, jewelled armor,
Rich rings and broaches, vast riches,
To pile on his breast and about him.
There Odin, bowed and sore grievèd,
Laid Draupner, the world's wealth and increase,
Odin gives Draupner; His ring-dropping-rings, and spoke bitter:
"Let Earth cease to bring forth her increase—
Let all things with all be confounded....
Would that Time itself might run backward
Or stop in its profitless courses."
Frigg, her carpet: Fulla, the grain. There Frigg laid her carpet of verdure
That covers the Earth; and Fulla,
The yellow grain of the harvest.

And through the still watches of night
Balder's death-watch is kept. When Nanna and Frigg sat beside him,
Sad Sigyn came to her sister,
The sad wife, truest and tenderest,
That Loke abandoned in Asgard
To wed the foul witch Angerboda;
And Sigyn mourned beside Nanna
For the wrong Loke did to her Balder.

And, late, Nanna slumbered; and sweetly
Nanna's vision. Peace settled upon her pale features—
A white flower silvered in moonlight;
And speech passed her lips, to a Vision
Addressed, and then she woke, joyful:
"Dear Mother and Sister, farewell!
Your Nanna may go to her Balder.
Our lives were so closely inwoven
That even in death we are mated—
Give thanks to kind Verdand', the weaver!
Dear Mother and Sister, farewell!"
And again Nanna slept,
And thenceforth did Frigg and sad Sigyn
Keep deathwatch for Nanna and Balder.
And when his great pyre was built,

She is laid beside Balder on his pyre.

On the broad deck of Ringhorn, his vessel,
By Balder's side they laid Nanna,
Till the solemn rites should be rendered
If Hermod returned from his Mission
With refusal to Asgard from Hel.

IV.

Hermod's journey to Hell.

In the meantime fleet Sleipner sped northward,
And never he stopped or turned back
As he galloped through valleys, o'er chasms,
Save once, at the Bridge, where a herald,
Its keeper, called "Hail!" to challenge
His passing. "I am Hermod! To Hel

HERMOD DEPARTING FOR HELL.

Is my mission, for Balder!"
And ready reply came, "Pass on!
It was over this Bridge he descended.
God speed thee! Greet Balder!"
And again vast stretches he covered
Till the Walls and the Gates rose, of Hell.
"Hail Hermod! hail Sleipner!" said Balder,

He enters Helheim

And drew near with Nanna to Hermod
To fondle the steed, as in Asgard
Was ever his wont....
But when he seemed to embrace them,
His arms, they were naught but a shadow;

And a shadow was Nanna, and shadows
The ghosts that swarmed 'round them,
Each bearing a brand on its forehead
Of Hel's, the slothful, the craven,
The wicked, but each with a hope
In its eyes, and a light as in Balder's,
For light still beamed from his eyes
And a halo still circled his body—
Heaven's Sun midst the shadows of Hell!

and receives Balder's message to Asgard.

"Hail, Hermod! Hail, Sleipner!" said Balder,
"But your journey to Helheim is bootless,
Save that you may bear witness in Heaven
When homeward you carry Hel's message
That love such as Nanna's has might
Far more than Hel's hate, e'en in Hell.
Bitter cruel is Hel, and unyielding—
Accept not, believe not her promise,
For hate fills her heart full of venom
And distrust gnaws her vitals with anguish.
Since Nanna has come, Hel has hidden
In Anguish, her palace in Nifhel,
Where she lies enraged in Despair,
For a hope that she trusted has failed her—
The sight of love's joy is Hel's sorrow....
But let not the Mid-Earth and Asgard
Grow gloomy as Helheim with mourning.
Charge this on our loved ones, returning,
And charge them to comfort each other—
And charge them to comfort poor Hoder;
Assure him I love him as ever,
For unwitting he slew me. Forgive him,
And when our last rites ye have rendered
Let Nature increase and be joyous—

Balder returns his gifts.

To this end I send my best grave-gift
Again to All-Father, his Draupner,
His ring-that-drops-riches."
And Nanna added her grave gifts:
"To Frigg I send back her soft carpet,
May flowers blossom upon it;
And to Fulla give back her gay girdle,
The maid with the waving gold tresses."

Hermod's descent to Nifhel,

And now Hermod continued his journey
To offer Frigg's ransom to Hel.
Through Slid he swam, River of Venom,
And kingdom and kingdom he traversed
Till he came to the lowest and darkest,
The Ninth, where Hel dwells in Anguish,
Her palace, and feasts at Famine,
Her banqueting-board, and rules
From Despair, her black throne, double seated
And canopied, waiting a mate—
But a mate will there never be found
To rule in that kingdom despairing,
For sole of her kind is Queen Hel.

SLID, RIVER OF VENOM.

Delay, her man-servant, led him
Across her threshold, Abysm,
And her maid-servant, Slowness,
Through portals and aisles, long approaches,
Led him thence to her audience room.
When Hel beheld Hermod approaching
and his audience with Hel. She rose from her couch, her hard Care-Bed,
Where rest she had sought;
She ascended Despair, and, haughty,
She spake as kings speak to war envoys.
So deathlike her presence, so grewsome,
Hermod's blood curdled cold, but he hailed her

And delivered the message he bore her,
His eyes fixed unflinching upon her.
And besought her send Balder and Nanna
To Asgard, and herself fix their ransom:
"Of the Asas choose any, our greatest—
Hermod's message, So dearly we love him—choose Hoder,
Appropriate mate." But Hel shuddered.

Bold Hermod spoke on:
"It is better for thee to give Balder,
For if Balder thou keep he'll oppose thee;
And all Hell will love him and hate thee—
And Nanna's he is."—Did Hel whiten?
Dead-cold was her voice as she answered,
and Hel's answer. "But does all Creation love Balder?
If all in the world of the living
Will weep him, take Balder, and Nanna;
Should any refuse, I will keep him."

The very ghosts in dark Helheim
All things weep for Balder Wailed loud when they heard her; gentle Nanna
Sobbed; and fleet Sleipner and Hermod
Shed tears as Hel's message they bore
Speeding back to the Mid-Earth and Asgard;
And wherever they passed Nature wept,
Hard stones wept, and metals, and plant life;
The mistletoe wept, and the oak-tree;
Wild beasts wept, and men, and the Asas
Who held funeral feast around Ringhorn.
And when they carried Hel's message
Wherever space stretched through Creation
There was weeping from all things that heard it.

And almost the Asas had hope
That fresh color had flushed his pale face
And that Balder was rising to greet them,
When a hag in her cave they espied,
Evil Thok, an old ogress.
except old Thok, "Oh Thok, weep Balder from Helheim,"
They prayed; but Thok answered,
"With dry tears of Thok will weep Balder!

Old Thok never joyed in his gladness—
Let Hel keep what she has garnered!"
She was gone, and the echoes repeated,
"Hel keep what she has garnered!"
And again, "Keep what she has garnered!"
And again, "She has garnered!" and "Garnered!"
Then, harshly, a laugh without mirth,
A screech and a cackle—they knew—
who is Loke disguised. "Loke's laughter, and we must miss Balder,
For Thok is Loke, who mocks us."

"

When, hopeless and silent, at sunset
They wended their way back to Asgard
And gathered again at the seashore,
One met them who, helpless,
Awaited their coming, blind Hoder.
"Oh, warrior brothers," he prayed them,
Hoder asks for death, "One who never could join you in battle
Begs a boon—do ye grant it in pity!
Deal me death, that slew Balder belovèd,
And in Hell let me join him to comfort,
For he loved me, and loves, though I slew him.
Then slay me, and let me lie dead
By him that I love....and forgive....
Unwitting I slew him....forgive!"

The plea of blind Hoder prevailed;
And young Vale and Vidar, in pity
and the Vala's word is fulfilled, when his breast is risted by Vale and Vidar. (That thread by the Weird Ones was woven
And none could alter that pattern)
Deep-risted his breast with the spear-point
Till his spirit passed, to join Balder.
So atonement he made, and in pity
They bore him dead to high Ringhorn
And laid him, red-dyed, beside Balder,
And in pity they wept and bewailed him.

And when the Tide had arisen
And the Deep and the Distance were calling,
Farewells are spoken, A last time they bade Balder farewell;
Father Odin stooped and addressed him,

And, graving a mark on his forehead,
He set his torch to the pyre;
Then the winds and the waves took high Ringhorn,
And, flame-bound, westward it drifted,
Away—and away—from their ken,
To regions whence no man returneth.
And none saw the end, nor can tell it.
Surely, that was the float fraught most precious
Of all, in time past, and forever.

and the ship Ringhorn drifts out with the tide.

And when it had passed their horizon
And Day went, and Night came, blackshrouded,

ODIN WHISPERING RUNES TO BALDER DEAD.

Odin's Farewell,

Odin spoke: "Farewell, we must miss thee,
Bright son, our hope and our joy!
Now the Weird Ones have swept thee to Helheim....
And wise is Weird with a Wisdom
That passeth our knowledge.
Let us bow our heads in submission....
As Weird wills, so be it!

and resignation.

"Come, Frigg; come, our children,
He gives hope to the Asas, And let us comfort each other.
A word I whispered to Balder
And a sign on his forehead I risted
That will quell hateful Hel,
A wise Word, fateful and runic,
The knowledge I added to knowledge
What time I o'erhung the abysses
To assuage the rancor of hate
And turn evil against the ill-doer.

"Lo, a Vision is rising before me—
and foretells Balder's glory, Humbly I thank thee, thou Weird One!—
I see Him, with sight that is certain....
And not Death, but Life Everlasting,
For His palace has sheltered no Evil!
That Mead that Hel brewed, mingling floods
His attainment of wisdom, Of all Fountains of Life, He will drink,
And all Wisdom, all Good will be His.
And the Dead that in love drink those waters
Are His, the Redeemèd and Blessèd,
and of the Blessed, For that Mead when they drink will transfigure
Their ghosts, and new bodies will clothe them
With Strength and with Beauty immortal.

"Oh Balder, our White One, our Just,
Though I gave my eye to buy Wisdom—
That draught of the flood of Urd's Fountain—
Thrice wiser art thou than thy Father!
His victory over Hel, Hateful Hel can never subdue Thee
To do her hard bidding....her Lord,
Whom she chose—and her Master!
And when the World-Web has been woven
And the fiery flames of Surt's vengeance
Have climbed from Earth to high Asgard,
When our Green Tree has sunk in gray ashes,
and his kingdom of Alfheim, Lo, thine the New Earth, the New Asgard,
The new Dawn... the new Realm of the Spirit!

"Sustain we ourselves and each other,
And keep our world bright, as He bade,
after Ragnarok. While we wait the blare of the Trumpet
That summons Creation to Doom."

So Odin. The Asas assented,
And long as they sat at the seashore
They spoke of those dear and departed,
Of the conquest of Hel, and the Judgment,
And heard Hermod rehearse of his journey—
How the Dead, even then, loved their Balder
And how Hel and her kingdom they hated.

ARGUMENT.

THIS mythology of the North presents a triple tragedy: (1) that of Loke and his kindred, the Jotuns; (2) that of Odin and his Circle of Asas in Asgard; and (3) that of Balder and those who join him in Hell. Loke's is the blackest tragedy, of evil done and not repented; Odin's is the tragedy of evil done that good may come of it, but acknowledged as evil; and Balder's, the tragedy of the good and the just and the peaceful who seem to be overcome by evil, but transcend it and prevail in spirit.

The cycle of northern myths, then, presents a world-theme, and the utilitarian ethics of Odin in building his Circle is the provoking cause of calamity in the whole series. As Rydberg shows, even while the immediate object for which Odin does evil is attained, evil results follow and develop, until at Ragnarok they will overwhelm him and his Circle. But after Ragnarok Justice will prevail in Balder's Realm of the Spirit.

Before he is caught and bound by the Asas Loke has plotted the domination of the world by his evil offspring, the Serpent, the Wolf and Hel; and with his own hand he has slain Balder, the Lord of Light, the Father of Justice, "whose palace has sheltered no evil." But bad as he is, this devil must be given his due. If we find him crafty and dishonest in his dealings with the Asas, we must admit that he is only meeting craft with craft, and bettering the example: if he does wrong that he and his may rule Creation, he is imitating Odin's policy for his Circle. Loke becomes the personification of destructive fire, a spirit of revenge, but was, until he was perverted, a loved spirit of warmth and brightness. From his own point of view he is more sinned against than sinning, for Odin has tried to exterminate the Jotuns in order to ensure his own dominion, and where he did not destroy Jotuns, bribed them or enticed them to turn traitor to their race and join his. Odin overreached the Jotuns, and stole from them, that he might add to the power of his Circle, thinking it his manifest destiny to prevail

because he had the chance. It is entirely fit that his career should end at Ragnarok by the swords of all whom he has wronged, the dwellers at the ends of the earth, Jotunheim, Muspelheim, Elfheim, and Hell. When all of Creation has been purged by fire, only Balder's Realm of Justice will remain, to become New Heaven and New Earth. In poetic justice, the race of Asas, that seemed the fittest to survive, goes to its doom because it has done all manner of injustice to gain power and prevail. So perish all that do such deeds.

LOKE'S PUNISHMENT.

After the death of Balder, Loke laughed in spite

WHEN the plot of that evil one, Loke,
Was sped, and Balder the Bright
Was doomed with Hel to abide,
While o'er Balder's bale, save for Thok,
The whole world wept,
Thok's self was Loke, who cackled
With laughter and ran to his cavern
Refusing to weep for Balder.

and fled from the Asas in fear.

That laugh was the last of his misdeeds,
For then Loke knew that the Asas
Would never forgive, and he fled them.
In many strange guises he fled them,—
As fly, bird, beast,
As fish in the flood, as earth-elf;
And still as he fled, still transforming,
Through the open he glided, a-shrinking,
Through the shadows he slunk, a-skulking,
And ever he felt in his hiding
That Odin's eye was upon him,
And ever abandoned his cover
To wander afresh.

Without the Apples of Youth and Strength, he grew aged.

He dared not return to green Gladsheim
To visit young Idun and Brage
And eat of their Apples immortal,
So apace old age crept upon him,
The fire in his eye burned to ashes,
His cheek hung wrinkled and withered,
And his foot dragged heavy and languid.
Very many the fears that oppressed him—
Was there nowhere a soul would assist him?

Haunted by fears, and lonely,

In all the wide world was no creature
A friend, for all he had injured
And now of all must be fearful.
When he swam in the sea, Jormungand,
His Serpent-son, rose up and hissed him;
To an island he neared, but Fenrer,
His Wolf-son, there snarled
When he saw him approach—
He hated the source of his being;
In a cavernous hillside he hid him,
But the Dwarf Andvare crawled forth
And drove him away with deep cursing
For wresting from him that Ring
That has carried gold's curse to Earth's kingdoms,
"A bane to the bearer shall be,
Bitter grief to the greedy of gold,
Haunting sorrow to all who possess
Gold weighted with wrong."....
How many and many have sorrowed,
And alas! how many will sorrow
Ere that curse of Andvare shall pass!....
And when as a hawk Loke soared,
The son of Thjasse, the Eagle,
Remembering young Idun, his sister,
That Loke led forth from her kindred
With her casket of youth-giving Apples—
Them the skill of Thjasse had fashioned
And now her kindred must hunger
While her foes may feast—
Pursued him to rend him in pieces.
So wherever he went some old deed
That was done in spite or in mischief
Raised its head like a snake's head, and hissed him,
And threatened to strike him and sting him.

Almost he was willing to perish,
Or to seek his old hag, Angerboda,
And their wolf-sons that lurk in the forest
Afar in the North, the dun Mirkwood—
But hate was the tie that bound them....
And Hel, his cold daughter in Helheim—
Her he fain would forget....
Not only he hated.... he dreaded.

he sought hiding in Helway,

Grown weary with wandering, haunted,
At the foot of a rock that looks northward
He hid in deep shadow,
Whence downward and northward leads Helway,
Bleak, and steep, and forbidding.
There never a living thing grows,
Gray lichens, or grasses, or mosses,
But hoar frost lies white in the moonshine.
And when, muffled close in her mantle,
Dark Midnight had passed on her mission,

where he saw his daughter Hel coming.

Hel's hounds came a-baying from Helheim
And a pale form rose from the Deep
That he knew, as a dream, in his slumber,
For Hel, his daughter, his tyrant,
And naught he could do to escape her....
His heart grew cold with its knowledge.
It was then for the first time he feared her,
This child of the worst in his being,
Supreme of her kind, Queen of Evil....
That thought wrung his heart with foreboding—
His Queen, to *himself* anguish-boding.

but was unable to flee her,

Loke struggled to rouse him, to flee her—
Far less did he dread the wronged Asas
Than Hel, as he saw her ascending—
But slumber still held him in bondage,
For Odin's Rune risted in aether
Turned evil upon the ill-doer.

And Hel came still closer, and closer,
Till the cold of her breath blew upon him;
The cold of her hands chilled his body;
Her eyes, cold-gleaming, transfixed him;
And her voice spoke, coldly, his doom:

and received her curse,

"So Loke would flee me? Fool, Coward,
And author of what he'll not look on!
Nay, yet thou shalt pray and beseech me
To take thee to Hell from thy torments!
This thy doom, and hope not to escape it:

Hell on Earth, Death in Life,—
To know goodness and light, but still hate them;
To see joy, but be banished forever;

To live in the world of the living,
But still without power to injure;
To will still to do, but lie bound;
To suffer in sight of Heaven's Asas,
Enduring their scorn, while the pity
Of her thou hast injured protects thee,—
Hell itself has no pains worse than thine be,
No chains like the chains that shall bind thee....
Live, languish, agonize,
Impotent, vacant, immortal—
Nay, look not for end to thy sorrow—
And remember, Loke, remember,
Wherever thou art, thou art mine."

And Loke moaned as he listened,
And bitter he groaned when he wakened,
Though the evil Queen had departed
And naught he beheld but bleak Helway
Downward and northward extending,
in utter loneliness. And naught he heard.... There was silence,
A stillness that throbbed with foreboding....

Alone was Loke, so lonely
He would fain have kept Hel there beside him—
Her cursing was better than silence....
Alone with the stars and the heavens,
And the stars and the heavens were aching.

II.

He is joined by his Asa-wife, Sigyn. But not alone to remain,
For before the first flush of the morn,
In the hush that awaits a new Dawn
Slow footsteps approached from the South,
And a voice, low and soft as a wind-harp,
Breathed, "Loke, Loke, my lord!"
That he knew; then a presence like sunshine
Illumined the place of his hiding,
Fair Sigyn, the True and the Tender,
Whom he had deserted in Asgard
To wed the foul witch Angerboda.
Now she had come down from high Asgard,

Womanly, motherly, wifely;
And still, if Loke had loved—
What might not the future have seen?
For she knew the wrongs he had done—
And she knew the wrongs he had suffered—
She would have found joy in forgiving.

He repulses her,

But was there no love in his heart?
Hateful and spiteful and vengeful
Loke answered. He hardened his heart
And accused her, suspicious,
That she from the Asas had come
To betray him, to bait him;
And so he reproached and reviled her.
And Sigyn looked sadly upon him
And silently bore his upbraiding;
And with him she stayed, that fair goddess,
Still living her dream of devotion,
Fulfilling the troth that she plighted.
And still she had hope.
And patiently went she with Loke
When later he hid in the mountains,
And steadfastly held her high purpose,
Sustaining her heart in its sadness
By telling it o'er the sweet tale
Of the days of their love, in far Asgard.

but finally suffers her to stay with him and bring their sons.

And Loke half feared her, and wondered
That still she should stay, but endured it,
Though he felt her presence but irksome.
And he suffered her summon their children,
The wilful Vare and Nare,
Whom she loved with the love of a mother
Though they tore her heart with unkindness.
And Loke, too, had no kindness
From them, but dread and dire danger,
For his sons did not care for his safety,
But under the vault of the heavens,
In the crystalline light of the Day Star,
They threatened and shouted,
Though Odin was watching on Air Throne.

He lives in retreat,

In the long, anxious days that succeeded
Loke sat in his house with wide windows

To all quarters of space, whence he watched
For the Asas to come from the North,
From the South, from the East, from the West,
While in thought he did over the deeds
Of his life. And not in the least
Was he sad for the wrongs he had done,
But all for the tricks that had failed him.
And those long anxious days was he busied
In netting a net, cunning meshes,
That seemed, as he made them, a symbol,
His life and the lives his had met,
Intermingled and knotted together.
The knots were the deeds he had done,
For each knot that he knotted was hard
And not to be loosened....
Each life his had met had been marred,
And was not to be mended.
But he joyed in the life he had lived
And the net he had made, as he pondered,
And so intently he netted
That the shouts of the Asas surprised him,
but is discovered by the Asas. For he had forgotten his danger.
War-ready, their ranks closed upon him—
Wise Odin, strong Thor, calm Tyr,
Shining Frey, swift Hermod, white Njord,
And Heimdal, that hated him ever—
The band that fills Asgard with glory.

With shouts hateful Vare and Nare,
His sons rejoice at his danger. His sons, wished him ill
And mocked their old father: "Lo, Loke,
The Asas! What youth, and what splendor!
Such the gods are, but thee! Art not jealous?
And such might we also now be
But for thee, thou old Jotun and wizard,
Whom we hate—Alas, for our birthright!
Flee? Do, but they'll catch thee—
And may they!"

III.

Loke hides in the guise of a salmon, And flee Loke did, wild with terror.
He flung his net to the fire

And flew to the Force, in whose flood
He leaped and he plunged, in the guise
Of a salmon, so seeking escape.
But the Asas saw him and knew him,
And taking a net, woven meshes
Like his, that they found in the ashes,
They followed him down in the water.
Twice he sought to pass to the ocean....
To dive under the net....to leap over....
but is caught in the Asas' net, But they caught him, strong Thor and wise Odin,
They caught him and, spite his guise, held him.

And when Loke's struggle was over,
And he lay there, no longer a salmon,
They dragged him into a valley
Where ledges of rock beetled o'er him
And mountain crests rose and enclosed him
and is bound to the rocks in a valley. That the heavens themselves scarce could see him—
None save Odin when seated on Air Throne.
And there to three rock-ribs they bound him
For a bed, and the thongs that they used
(A horror—he scarce could endure it!)
Were the entrails of wolfish Vare,
His son, that hated and mocked his old father
And killed and devoured his brother.

Loke struggled, and groans shook his body,
He struggles proudly, Though proudly he strove to control him
While the Asas stood by looking on him.
Then a Serpent from over the summit
Came to torture and feast, as a spider,
When a fly is caught in its meshes,
Comes to play with it struggling, and kill it.
but is tortured by a serpent But so fearful the play of the lightning
That leaped from his eyes when he saw it,
So piercing, so hunted, so blinding,
And so fearful those serpent-eyes stony
That, alike fixed in terror, they gazed,
The Serpent and Loke, bound both
By a spell that neither can break,
And binding each other forever
By a spell that neither can lessen.

Prone lay the snake,
Its thin neck stretching down
And its flat head depressed,
Its cleft tongue hanging limp,
Dropping venom distilled
Where Loke lay rigid beneath it.
As it dropped, drop by drop,
It encrusted his body, and burned,
That he writhed in his anguish
And fought with the strength of his godhead,
While the Asas stood by, and derided.

until his pride is broken.

Then his pain broke his pride, spite of Loke,
Cries of agony startled the mountains,
And backward and forward they hurtled
Through the vales, o'er the plains, up to Asgard,
And down to the nether abysses.
In all places their tidings were welcome
That the days of his misdeeds were done
And that Loke lay helpless and harmless.

The Asas torture him with taunts,

The wide world listened, rejoicing, it seemed,
And with mocking and laughter:
"Thy desert now thou hast, dost thou like it?"
Said one, and "Could we but do so
With usury we would repay thee!"
"Aye, aye," cried the rest, taunting Loke.
"Thy chickens come home to their roost
With their broods; count them, Loke!"
"Thou wert wont to pour vials of torments
On victims in sport. Dost remember?
Now ours is the sport, thine the torment;
And remember the pain of thy victims!"
His base deeds to remembrance they brought
In wrath, and for vengeance,
To requite ill with ill in like measure,
For so it seemed good to the Asas
To torture their prisoner, Loke.

but his wife, Sigyn, in mercy

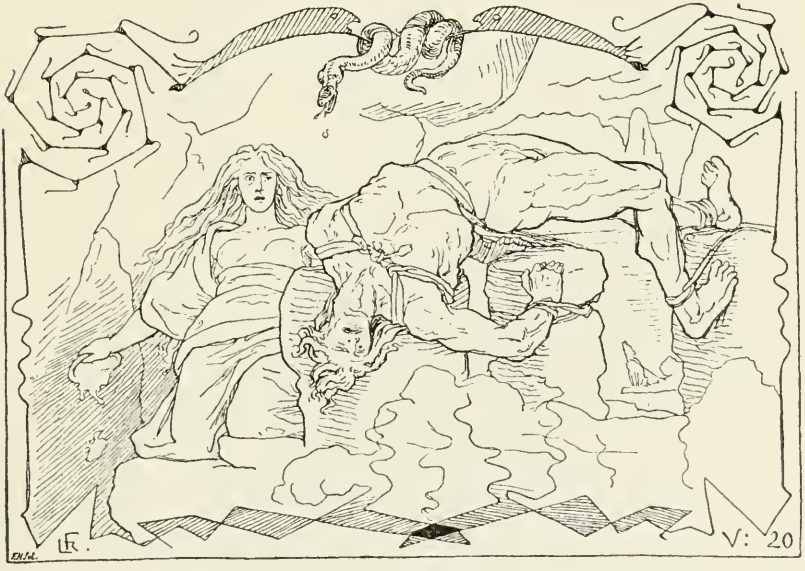
To all save his sad-eyed wife Sigyn.
To her tender heart, wise in sorrow,
No rejoicing it brought that Loke
Must sing that terrible song

In torment, but she pitied his pain,
An added weight to the woes
Of a world but too woful without it.
Her soul was sad as she heard them,
Mourning her mood:

pleads for him,

"Oh Father, oh brothers, have pity!
Our world is too heavy with sorrow
To wring one cry that is needless
From the bitter breast of a captive,
Long bitter with wrongs ye inflicted
On those dear to him, as his kindred.
Now Loke is bound and harmless,
And Loke's children are outcast,
The Wolf, and Hel, and the Serpent.

reproaches the Asas with their own wrong doing,



SIGYN, LOKE AND THE SERPENT.

Enough let it be that the safety
Of Asgard and Earth are assurèd—
The brave never injure the helpless....
Leave Loke to me, give your blessing.
And perhaps, some day in the Future—
Perhaps—for he may repent him—
Perhaps I may bear to glad Valhal

and announces her purpose to stay with him.

A word for peace and forgiveness.
If not—but let me not think it—
Still here will I stay,
And will labor to lessen his anguish;
And still I can hope for a whisper
Of love, that will long to be voiced
When it wakens to life, toward one....
And toward all....
In mercy now go....
I will bear it!"

The Asas were touched by her pleading,
That goddess' so sad and devoted;
The laughter died from their voices,
And their taunting, scornful and biting,
Lay hushed on their lips into silence.
And pity entered their hearts
For Loke, that he must be lorn
Of her love, that his heart had cast from him....
And awe came upon them at Evil
Itself. Whence came it? How comes it?
Why did Loke succumb?—and why they?
For they—they, too, were infected.
Each knew in his secret soul
Of hopes and desires and deeds
That he wished he need not remember;
And it softened their hearts toward Loke
To know that no Asa was blameless,
And that they themselves had been tempters.
And it seemed an inscrutable Other
Moved him and moved them divers ways.
Were they puppets alike? and warped
By the stuff that was theirs from their forebears?

Thor agrees with her words,

"Sigyn is right," Asa Thor spoke,
"Bound is Loke, and harmless,
And the brave never injure the helpless!"

IV.

"Aye, Sigyn is right," said All-Father;
and Odin also. "Now that Loke is bound and harmless,
For us 't is enough that the safety
Of the Heavens and the Earth are assurèd.

And bound are the children of Loke,
The Serpent, the Wolf, and that other,
The Queen of ravenous Hell.

Odin shows the present perils of Asgard

Do ye see the shade in the valley?
It is spread by the wings of the Eagle;
Do ye hear his screaming eerie?
'T is Thjasse's son threatening Asgard—
Alas for our Heavenly City
That its gold must be weighted with wrong!
Do ye hear the call from the Sea-Stream
Sucked down in a whirlpool? The Serpent.
And the howl of the Wolf? 'T is wild Fenrer.
The baying? Hel's hounds—Angerboda's.
Ye know those sounds and their portents.
Ye know the mustering foes
To be met in the Future as erewhile....
And not the less to be feared
Because they give evil for evil
To destroy the fair world that we fashioned
By seeking advantage from theirs.
It was I for myself and my Circle—
Was it well?....*Was* it well?

"Do the Norns themselves know the outcome,
They that sit at the roots of the World-Tree
And weave the web of the World-Life?
Know they the End and Beginning?....
Or draw they the threads from the Unknown,
And toss the torn shreds to the Unknown?....

and reminds the Asas of their vows of brotherhood.

Ye know how, late, in our Valhal,
In winter, since Balder is dead,
We sat at our tables, heroes
Eating and drinking, and singing
The hero-deeds we remembered,
In the warmth and light of our fires,
While without all was hoarfrost and storm.

He compares life to the flight of a swallow.

Then in swam a swallow, skimming
From one wide door to the other.
For a moment he circled, he twittered,
Enjoying the warmth—
Welcome guest with feathers at banquet—
And then, in a twinkling, was off,

And had passed—from Winter, to Winter....
E'en such, methinks, is our life.
It comes from no man knows whence,
It goes to no man knows whither.
It flutters a space, and in it
We build for ourselves and our Circle
And strive to do action heroic....
And at last we may fail of our purpose....

He glories in action

"But ah! the glory of striving,
The joy of our work for our World's Good!
If vanquished, victors it leaves us.
Foes surround us, and we must endure it.
Foes surround us: shall Asas surrender?

Nay, Asas, life is a Battle,
The day of the Present is passing,
The darkness is coming, Time's flying;

and urges the Asas to action

Let each ere he die do the deeds
That he may, and rejoice in the doing
Though he know not the end....
Else belong he to Hel and her sluggards.
If we die, as the Vala foreshadowed,

against Hel and her brood.

Let us die dealing death for our Circle,
To Hel and to hers;
And after, as Vala foreshadowed,
When the Battle that Last Day is ended

He rejoices in Vala's prophecy of the kingdom of Balder, and

Our Balder, the Bright, will arise,
For his Palace has sheltered no evil,
The Peaceful and White,—
Him our souls still sigh for —
And Nanna will rise from dark Helheim,
And the same World will rise that bred us,
But refreshed and ever renewèd,
As Asgard the Golden anew,
But higher, more splendid, new namèd,
Will rise in the glorified heavens,
In the Land of Spirit eternal....

"And we—shall we, too, spring anew?
We know not and we need not to know.

inspires the Asas to meet Fate as heroes.

And Evil—will it spring anew?
We know not and we need not to know.
Enough that to-day is our own.

Let us gather the brave to our banners
And trust that cause to wise Skuld—
To a hero will death come but once....
Come gather about me, and hear me.
I will rist you the Rune I created
What time I o'erhung the Abysm.
Touch ye each the hand of a brother,
Fix your eyes on Asgard above us,
Lift up your voices in union
And sing the New Song that I sung."

v.

He rists the runes of Peace and Strength.

Then Odin the mighty Rune risted
That gives peace and strength to the Asas,

for them,

And together they chanted his verses,
Brave hearts!—the song they will sing
When he leads them into the Battle

sings the Song that gives courage,

That Last Day, in the Dusk of the Nations.
Rising and falling like breakers
That beat on the sands of the seashore
It sounded under their shieldboards,
And deep, like the roll of far billows,
Rolled the voice of All-Father in union.

Then, lifting their hands over Sigyn,

and finally leads them back to Asgard,

They wended their way from the valley,
Ascending to pinacled Asgard;
And Loke, the wanton and Evil—
Very willingly would they have eased him,
But Hel's dread curse was upon him
And on hers she must work out her will.

leaving Sigyn with Loke, to render him service and win him from vengeance and hate.

Alone beside Loke stood Sigyn.
She could not loose him, and would not,
But she strove to lessen his anguish
And open the floodgates by kindness
That the streams of his love might start flowing.
A cup she made, joining her fingers,
To catch the withering venom
That fell from the fangs of the Serpent,

To spill it or ever it burned him.
So, unsleeping, his pain she endures,
In the glare of the sun in the summer,
In the pinch of the cold in the winter,
Through the watches of noon and of midnight;
And she listens, by hope still sustained,
Again to-night, and forever,
Till he whisper that Word.

But Loke will not relent,

But Loke relents not, and speaks not,
Save when, her cup overflowing

THE ASAS ASCENDING TO ASGARD OVER BIFROST.

And the venomous drops on him spilling
And rankling, he cries aloud and he curses,
And save when, at midnight,
When the stars are most awful in heaven,
The howling of hounds heralds Hel.
Then he moans and he mutters, by turns
Praying Hel, *now to pass. . . .now to take him.*

though Sigyn is steadfast,

Still she listens and watches, lone Sigyn,
That Goddess of Sorrows; and her face
Is alight with a passion of pity,
Transfigured by self-abnegation
And unthanked devotion—the steadfast!

But who shall say it is thankless?
And who shall say it is useless?
Still Weird will go as it will.

until Ragnarok.

Surely Mercy is better than Vengeance,
Mayhap Love will prove stronger than Justice
And Sigyn win Loke from Hel.

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Balder's Death and Loke's Punishment

by

Cornelia Steketee Hulst